

Seven Sins

by

Quinn Agathoni

Book One

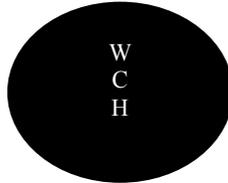
Sloth and Lust

Part One

SLOTH

Published by William Cornelius Harris UK
In collaboration
with
Second Chance
Supporting Mental Health in Performing
Arts
ISBN 978 – 1 – 291 99925 - 6
Copyright © Quinn Agathoni 2014
All rights reserved

Open Door, 224 Jamaica Road, London
SE16



Second Chance
You may need it next

Meet the Author

"Quinn Agathoni" is a pseudonym of singer-songwriter Alcuin Edwards

Bourne and surrounding villages are in the Wapentakes of Kesteven and Holland in South Lincolnshire but I have taken such liberties with history and geography as I felt necessary for the story,

Any resemblance between characters depicted herein and any persons living or dead are entirely coincidental, not to mention extremely far-fetched. This is fiction after all.

to the denizens of the Void.

Part One
SLOTH

CHAPTER 1

The train to Peterborough was clean and modern but after that came the bus. It was blue and cream and it looked like it was made when Matthias Corvinus was a boy.

Janie stared out of the window as the bus rattled her over the flat landscape at glacial pace.

Here was neither the majestic dark beauty of the mountain home of her childhood nor the shining towers of glass and steel that took their place in London. Instead, there was a plain of green fields stretching to the horizon.

She sighed.

Over and over again she sighed.

Eventually the bus left the region of black earth and crawled between the acres of newly built houses that showed she had arrived in Bourne.

There was no cab office at the bus station but she had seen one in the town about a half mile back.

She didn't know where Uncle Peter lived and she had no number so she dialled the cab company instead.

Time passed in the bus station. Flies buzzed. Some young boys were smoking defiantly, stubbing out cigarettes on the

'No Smoking'

sign. They were shouting exuberantly, practising their Anglo-Saxon and then one turned to Janie. "Ey, blondie. Yah minge itchin'? Want me to fill un?"

Janie ignored them and stood watching the road for signs of the cab.

"Ey 'srood not to talk to wuss."

"Pardon?"

They were young, standing on the threshold of manhood perhaps with muscles starting to grow and with sparse hair growing on their zit-ridden chins. They stood in a parody of menace and Janie laughed.

As they gathered around, hooting and jeering. Janie aimed her foot with wall-shattering strength at the nearest pair of testicles.

As the closest boy doubled over, she said, not even taking her eyes off the road. "I'd take your friend to the hospital if I were you".

One boy flicked open a blade.

"Seriously?" asked Janie. "Do you boys have a death wish or something?"

Janie stood taller than most of them. She turned to face the boy with the knife, her grey eyes burning hot like storm clouds and said, "I came here for a rest. Don't bother me and I won't bother you."

She reached out to take the knife from him, taking the blade in her palm and letting her blood drip on the floor as she forced it from his hand. "Leave me." she said, and they did.

For a while, she was alone in the bus station with her cut slowly healing as the puddle congealed on the floor.

Eventually though, the cab arrived.

"Miss Hunyadi?"

She gave him the address and got in.

Uncle Peter's House was to the East of the town, standing alone in the fens. It had once been a railway station but the railway had ceased to run in the 1880s and the village of Twenty had more or less died around it.

Uncle Peter looked as old as his house and as miserable as the leaking skies above.

"You've grown", he said.

"Hello Uncle Peter."

"Just 'Peter'. I'm not your Uncle lass, just somebody with an obligation to your father."

"Well, thank you Peter for taking me in."

"Didn't do it for you."

He turned and walked into the house. Janie paid the cab driver and hefted her suitcases, following him inside the former Railway Station.

"Your guardian did a real crap job lass," said Peter, "I hope I'll do better."

"Who? What?"

"He's supposed to keep you on the straight and narrow and yet here you are, abandoning your destiny at the first sign of trouble."

"I don't..."

Peter cut her off, his parchment face reddening. "Oh what's the use? You abandon your destiny if you want. Maybe you can end up as queen of the revolting creatures in this godforsaken swamp.

Janie looked around at the fertile, black plain. Before she could ask the question, Peter answered it.

"They've dragged it up from the sea but there's still a disgusting miasma of rot and death".

"London's no better and as for our own little patch of nightmare, Severian Banat is far beyond anything England could produce."

"First off, Princess Jadwiga, I will not tolerate this lack of respect for your heritage. It's bad enough you call yourself 'Ms. Hunyadi' and run away from your destiny but I will not sit back while you mock the heritage that brought you here."

"And second," he continued, "I know you've not even been to Banat since you were five. It's not a 'People's Republic' any more, even if it is not the kingdom it is supposed to be, The Carpathians are civilised now."

Janie shrugged.

The evening wore on with Peter criticising Janie's choice of lifestyle on every ground imaginable until finally he relented and showed her to her room.

In contrast to the rest of the house, it was light and airy with a thick eider down quilt and cool cotton sheets. She smiled as she lay down to sleep. Perhaps in the English countryside, the nightmares would stop.

The nightmares did not stop.

Janie awoke, or dreamed she awoke, in a silent darkness undreamed of and perhaps even impossible in London.

She listened out for sound and heard nothing at all.

No sirens.

No engines.

No drunken couplings in the road outside.

There was no wind, although if she concentrated, she could hear the ticking of the grandfather clock downstairs. Quieter still was the sound of the house itself, creaking, barely louder than Janie's own heartbeat.

Still she strained to hear something in the silence, something more quiet than her own body.

A breath.

A word.

A whisper.

"Jadwiga of Banat," sneered the whispering silence, "runs away from destiny and then runs some more when destiny threatens her again. You've come to the end of the line little princess."

Janie frowned. Was this a dream? Perhaps it was Peter's doing, seeds planted in her subconscious. It sounded a little like his voice with Carpathian consonants submerged beneath those English rural vowels.

But no. It could more easily be her own voice. Something in her heart perhaps. After all, she had told Kate precisely that, when she had been seeking arguments for not coming here in the first place.

Janie knew she needed to be in London but she could not be of any help to anyone if she woke screaming every night.

The whispers continued. This did not sound like something from her own mind.

"You are useless," said the voice. "You will fail. Failure is your new destiny and it is far better to stay here and wallow in it. Better to sleep than let failure break you. Remain a child, Janie Hunyadi. Refuse to grow up. There is nothing you need to do. Nothing at

all. Go back to sleep little girl. No need even to dream. Just listen."

She did. The wind rose a little and the quiet creaking of the house grew a little less quiet, like the rocking of a ship at sea or of a cradle in an apple tree. Janie sank into a deep but in no way silent sleep.

She awoke the next morning, aching and with sleep piled up behind eyes reluctant to open. She blinked at the brand new day and pulled the covers and the pillow over her head.

"Good girl," whispered the voice, "stay in bed and sleep the day away without dreams or plans."

She sat up, letting the covers fall away. She was in a thick, cotton nightshirt that she could not remember putting on. It was comfortable. So very comfortable.

"Wake up, Janie," called Peter, his words reinforced by a smell of bacon frying and of garlic and paprika and other delightful scents. "Come on downstairs. If you're going to hide away here, I'll be damned if you stay in bed while you do it. It's a three kilometre walk to town and you need breakfast and coffee."

She lay down again and pulled the covers tightly around her ears but he was not going to leave it at that. "Get up, you lazy girl", he roared, "Now!"

After his relentless noise carried on for a while, she finally, reluctantly acquiesced and made her way, step by creaking step, down for breakfast.

Peter had mixed the English traditional bacon and eggs, with Turkish coffee and piles of Banatian sausages and piroshki. Janie doubted that she'd keep down her

waistline with such fare unless she exercised a lot more.
Maybe that was the idea.

"Perhaps I will run into town", she said.

Peter nodded.

"I'm still not hiding from destiny".

Peter said nothing.

"Kate thought I needed a rest."

"Kate", growled Peter.

"She fought beside me in the Vampyre War."

"And this means you should fuck her because?"

Janie gasped. "What did you say? Back home, I could have you impaled for less."

"If it meant you accepted your destiny, I'd sit the pole myself."

The argument blazed. Rage contorted both of their faces but then, suddenly as if a switch had been pulled, both sank into torpor.

"Whatever", muttered Janie in her lassitude.

"You will do as you must", sighed Peter.

They ate in venomous silence and Janie could feel the weight of the place pressing down on her shoulders. Slowly, straining as if against a great weight Janie forced herself to her feet. She clenched her teeth as she fought to find words.

"I'm going for a run", she said.

She felt the tarmac sucking at her feet but she forced herself to keep moving. Whichever way she turned, a howling gale pushed her back and yet she could see smoke rising vertically in the distance.

As she plodded along, she heard the voices whispering in her ears. "Daughter of crows, you will never fly again, you will scabble in the dirt with the rest of my subjects."

Janie pushed the voice back forcefully and jammed her phones into her ears as if she planned to shove them deep into her brain. She let Olex Kullinkovich growl into the silence as Neuro Dubel played "Krai".

Janie growled too and kept on moving though her weight seemed to grow with every step. She wondered if perhaps Peter was right. Perhaps she really was avoiding her destiny

The voices clamoured at that, shrieking out Janie's worthlessness and denying she even had a destiny to avoid. Besides they said, she would never leave Bourne. Nobody ever did. It was the whisperer's domain.

CHAPTER 2

"I am the God of Small Town Life," howled the gale pressing her backward even though the air was still. "You will never leave this place. You are mine".

Janie kept running through the tumult though and the voices faded into silence.

That was the first time she ran along the Spalding Road from Twenty to Bourne, but it was not the last. Over the weeks the voices faded away as her daily act of defiance became routine. Her arguments with Peter also cooled. The old man seemed to grow older as the days wore on, as if the effort to admonish Janie had exhausted his capacity for wrath, or indeed of any other expression of emotion.

Janie ate and ran in silence, spending more and more time in the small market town on the edge of the fens.

She had come to Bourne to escape the clamour of London and that had worked. Brunnians were a quiet folk, never bothering strangers although never trusting, never welcoming either.

Janie recalled some of H P Lovecraft's stories and wondered if perhaps the common South Lincolnshire look she saw on so many faces could be classed like 'that Innsmouth look' as a sign of monsters in the family tree.

She giggled at the thought but it stayed there. Perhaps they were all related instead and it was

inbreeding, rather than the genes of monsters that gave them all that tawny, fair-haired, muddy-eyed look.

It was quiet though the sun was warm and she soon discovered there was an outdoor swimming pool where everyone came in the afternoon to absorb the sun like so many green plants.

The attendant told her that a mile was 32 lengths of the pool and so she added that to her daily routine: run from Twenty to Bourne; swim thirty two lengths of the swimming pool; run around the Abbey Lawn, pausing to watch if there was football, cricket, tennis or even crazy golf going on; then pass on to the library (which had fewer books than Olivia kept at home, let alone a proper library); and so to lunch.

To begin with, her run had been accompanied by Eastern European rock music in the languages of her childhood. Slowly though, that changed and she began to run instead to 'Every Day Is Exactly The Same' by Nine Inch Nails. Now *that*, she thought one night, *was* her subconscious speaking. Whatever had been whispering had taken her rebellion and knitted it into complacent, repetitive action, as if she were an animal in a zoo.

One day, she tried to change the routine. Instead of running Westward along Spalding Road, she turned along the fen run and ran North instead until the road itself took a right angle and she found herself in Dyke, a prettier village than Twenty with some signs of a community.

And yet, it was a sullen community, much like Bourne itself. The people looked the same, perhaps with

a hint of red in their sandy hair, or maybe a green shoot in their mud-coloured eyes.

She took a coffee in the pub. It was nothing like the Turkish coffee she would usually drink but the alternative was warm, muddy, English beer. Refreshed, she ran on until she found herself on the A15, North of Bourne.

She decided to turn right. She was sure she had done, and yet her feet chose to turn left, southward, and back into Bourne.

"Foolish little chicken", said the voice inside her, "You are mine now and in my domain you will stay."

There was another village on the right. It was called Cawthorpe and boasted that it was home to a conference centre. Janie shrugged. That sounded even more stultifying than the Whisperer's realm itself. She ran on into Bourne.

There were other days, bright and sunny days when the light glittered on the ornamental pond in the Memorial Gardens and she watched the koi carp lazily swimming around the limits of their world.

There was a shelter in the corner of the Garden, by the river where willows stood weeping in solidarity with walnut trees who were awaiting a beating. Janie smiled a little at that, imagining that here was where young Brunnians went for casual fucks on warm Spring afternoons.

There was none of that today though, the place was deserted except by a couple of thrushes in the throes of a

violent territorial dispute. Janie was almost disappointed. She remembered similar couplings in a bandstand by the River Roding with Finn.

Now why had her mind run onto Finn after all this time? She hoped it would be a good sign.

"Fuck sake Janie!" declared a new voice within, Finn's voice. "Fuck are you keeping in that head of yours? No. Don't tell me. Jayzus Janie, haven't I told you about letting demons in?"

Janie began to protest but Finn didn't need to breathe and so didn't stop long enough for her to get into the one-sided conversation. "Oh but it's not IN your head is it? Your head is in It! Well it ain't Hell coz you ain't dead. I know that because I am, and trust me, I'd know if you were."

"In here", he said, and led her, voice calling the while, into a shadowy, abandoned cottage, long used for cows or pigs or something equally stinky. But it was the shadows more than the stink he wanted because in the darkness...

Finn smiled as he grew visible to Janie's sight.

He stood there, as full of life as ever with his black eyes blazing above his ruddy cheeks. Dark curly hair formed a chaotic halo around that crooked smile of his. He looked as young as he had when a careless moment let the vampire take him and yet providence had snapped his neck before the vampire could make him one of them. Now he was a ghost and what a gorgeous ghost at that.

"Damn it Janie, that ain't fair. I've been dead for five years and you *still* look like a teenager." Janie knew

that was no exaggeration. The women of her line did age well. That's why so many had been burned over the centuries. Even princesses can burn, especially when it becomes something of a family tradition, a destiny even.

Janie smiled back at him. "Death has been kind to you Finn, but then, you always knew it would, didn't you. After all, it owed you so many favours."

In life, Finn had been a shaman although nothing like the stereotype. Instead of animal skins and horns and feathers, Finn would dress in no label jeans, which he swore he had made himself, even though Janie had seen for herself that his hands were hardly ever steady enough for him to roll his own spliffs, let alone sew. Then again, they were old, older than his Waterboys' t-shirt and even his ancient-beyond-retro baseball boots so it was just possible that he had made the jeans before the drugs and booze had taken their toll.

Of course, though he did not look like the stereotype, he did *smell* like the stereotype. Janie had found this exciting in itself and not just because it would piss off whoever had been charged with protecting her morals at that time.

He had also kept at the back of his untidy thatch of curly hair, a long, neat, dark rat-tail in respect, or so he claimed, of his totem animal.

Janie had suspected that Finn's shamanism was nothing but a pose, and perhaps an excuse to save money on deodorant. That changed the first time the two of them fucked. Finn had taken her with him to the Underworld and had stared deep into her eyes as if he were a shiny, black kingfisher, diving for fish in the grey pools of her own.

"Princess Jadwiga", he had whispered, or asked, or exclaimed although in truth it was a mixture of all of these. "You kept that one quiet didn't you?"

Janie had sighed. Irritation had undulated beneath her unaccountably scaly hide. "Would you have believed me rat-boy?" she had asked, "And if you had, would you still have fucked me?"

He'd given that some thought before answering. "Fair point. Probably not, and that would have been a shame because I love you Janie Hunyadi or Jadwiga of Banat or Lizard from Crow's Egg, or whatever other names you will choose to bear and I will love you beyond death."

Finn smiled at Janie in the darkness as they reminisced and said, "I wasn't lying, was I?"

Janie shook her head. "You weren't lying, but *five years!?* What were you waiting for Finn? Were you watching me with other loves?"

"Mostly no, although the girl you have in London... the cop? She is fucking gorgeous. Shame she doesn't do drugs. I bet she tastes like Heaven."

Finn smiled wistfully while Janie blushed at the thought of the taste of Kate. Finn's smile became a grin. "Hey, no worries love. I'm dead. Jealousy would be bloody pointless for either of us."

"Which one of you do you think I'm jealous of."

Clearly Finn had lost the capacity to blush. "Fair point again," he said, "point is though, I said I'd love you beyond death and I do, and the reason I've waited so long is..."

CHAPTER 3

“...You've never been in anything like so much trouble as you are now, and that includes walking into the lair of the Queen of Vampyres with no guards save a seventeen year old trainee copper and a junkie punk.”

Finn indicated wide horizons within the darkness, stretching his scrawny arms as far as they would go and said, "You've walked into a demon's home grounds and I don't know what it takes to get you out but I swear down that I'm not going to let some misbegotten demon grab your beautiful soul when we both know it's your own and even if it wasn't it would be mine."

Finn had an arrogant, irritating smile, but Janie let it go. "So, what do we do?"

"Dunno. I'll think of something or I'll ask the rats if that doesn't work. In the meantime, let's look around your prison. Have you found the walls yet?"

"I think I found some of the Northern edge at the point where Dyke village meets the A15."

"Wait. There's really a village called Dyke?"

"Grow up, Finn and focus".

"Then we can trace it from there", he said, the smile dropping for a moment. "You drive. I'm a bit insubstantial and besides, given the amount of alcohol in my system when I died, I'm probably still not fit to drive five years later."

"Drive?"

"Oh, Janie, don't be obtuse. I mean I'll tell you where you need to go, there's no need for possession. I wouldn't do that to you anyway."

"Right."

And so began the slow tour of the edge of Janie's prison, or of the demon's ground into which she had stumbled.

It was large as prisons go: including as it did the villages of Dyke, Cawthorpe, Lound, Toft, Thurlby, Northorpe, Tongue End, Pode Hole and Twenty as well as Bourne itself but as a range for one such as Janie, very small indeed, maybe twenty five square miles.

"Trust me", said Finn, "when you grow up, you'll know why that's too small. You'd never survive."

Janie frowned. "What do you mean?" Even in the sunlight, where Finn was invisible, she felt she could hear his grin as he said, "Spoilers, baby. Right now, trust me, you don't wanna know".

"You know I'd slap you if I could?"

"Yeah, but you can't, so I can be as annoying as I like."

Janie could not even storm off in a huff as there was no real physical presence to storm away from. Instead, she sighed and asked politely, "Finn, would you please leave me alone for a while."

That almost-audible grin faded and with a popping sound, he was gone.

She sighed as she remembered how it had been that time in Ilford. He had been gorgeous then, but so had she. They had found a place by the river Roding, where the world was hidden by a huge round tree, an Oak perhaps, something old anyway and that was just as Finn loved it. He was all she was not, his dark flowing locks caressing her pale shoulders while his red lips pressed to the bristle-short transparency of her own pale hair.

His dark, dark eyes had been shining as he looked into the pale depths of her own with overwhelming lust and his brown hands moved urgently as they sought ways to open up her jeans and lift her shirt and find the pale pink skin within.

She had not been a virgin at the time but the sweet urgency of his thrusting had ignited fires she had forgotten. Excitement travelled over her like a dry tsunami and her body ached for him. She loved the rough feel of the oak behind her rubbing red raw her pink skin while Finn found the brighter pinkness of the centre of her and pushed himself into her, playing her like a violin until their concerto reached its crescendo and he exploded inside her just as the world exploded in her head.

One day, Janie even asked Peter if he had known Bourne was a trap.

He sighed, his brow seeming to grow extra wrinkles just so that he could frown.

"Why did you think I did not welcome you, Princess? This prison is too small for your destiny. You must escape." At that, Peter clasped his head and said, "I cannot help you. I am tired and I must lie down."

Janie paced the boundaries of her prison at least six times during the next few weeks and managed to walk, or even run, for thousands of miles without getting beyond the limits set by the demon,

"Aye aye?" said Finn one day, "somebody's watching you."

"Yeah, you and the demon."

"Someone else."

"Who? Should I be worried?"

"Dunno. She seems harmless enough but I can't read her. She's alive, but feels as empty and as hungry as a vampire."

"Which one is she?"

Janie walked over to the girl Finn had pointed out. She was making no attempt to hide her interest and had hardly even blinked as Janie approached her.

"Can I help you?"

"I wish you could Miss. Sincerely. I really wish you could but I see you pacing the walls of our prison. Looks as though you're as trapped here as the rest of us, and yet you haven't given up. I like that."

The girl's mud-coloured eyes were smoky with unshed tears. They were lined with kohl and Janie imagined ('You're right' said Finn) that was to hide red rims, irritated by constant crying.

"Nor have you", Janie realised. "All you do is cry and hope and I don't know, maybe pray but you haven't given up. Maybe I'm the answer to your prayers."

Finn gasped. "Janie! Playing with religion is dangerous. You could get yourself killed. I know, I did."

"Who is your friend?" asked the girl, "The ghost?"

"Fuck! You can see me?"

"Yeah, I can see him, Janie is it? But I don't speak to strange spirits. I'm Sally."

"Pleased to meet you Sally. The ghost is Finn. He's my oldest friend and sometimes more."

"Why is he haunting you?"

"He wants to break me out of here."

"Silly Ghost", said Sally, "Can't be done. Gotta kill the God of Small Town Life or whatever it calls itself. Only then can you get out. The barrier is a part of its wosname - essence."

Janie frowned and so for that matter did Finn. "Is that even possible?" they both asked together.

"Dunno, but even I can't get through the barrier and I don't listen to the voices. So, if we can't kill the beasties, then we're stuck, except maybe for you Finn, but I don't see how that gets *us* out of here."

Sally gasped into silence, eyes suddenly wide and her mouth making an 'O'.

Janie followed Sally's gaze and saw a man in tweeds approaching. He was red-faced from his bald pate to his treble chin. He marched toward them.

Product Details
ISBN 9781291888256
Copyright Quinn Agathoinn
(Standard Copyright Licence)
Edition first edition
Publisher William Cornelius Harris
Published 20 October 2014
Language English
Pages 92
Binding Perfect-bound Paperback
Interior Ink Black & white
Weight 0.19 kg
Dimensions (centimetres)
14.81 wide x 20.98 tall